

**MINUTES**  
**UNITED TENNESSEE VETERANS ASSOCIATION (UTVA)**  
Legislative Plaza, Room 31 Nashville, Tennessee **Tuesday, June 3, 2014**

**Please view video stream**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7O2ONkaxEi4&feature=youtu.be>

<b>Speakers</b>	
Charlene Ehret	Director, VAMC Mt. Home
John E. Patrick	Director, VISN9
Travis Kraft	Assistant Director, VARO

<b>UTVA Members Present</b>	
George Martin	AmVets
Frank Forbes	Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
John Furgess	Veterans of Foreign Wars - Tennessee
George 'Mike' Scott	Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
Barry Rice	Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)
Vicki Stinnett	WAVES National
Mary Ross	Women Veterans of America (WVA) Chapter 20
Kathy Bell	Women Veterans of America (WVA) Chapter 20
Shawn Poston	Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)

<b>TDVA Members Present</b>	
Many-Bears Grinder	Commissioner
Wendell Cheek	Deputy Commissioner
Yvette Martinez	Assistant Commissioner – Outreach & Communications
Roger Harrell	Director of Claims

**I. Call To Order**

At 1:00 p.m., Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder took roll call, and confirmed that a quorum is present. Commissioner Grinder called the meeting to order with a welcome to all attendees.

**II. Invocation**

Deputy Commissioner Wendell Cheek gave the invocation.

**III. Pledge of Allegiance**

William Crawford led the Pledge of Allegiance for the meeting.

**IV. Presentation of Agenda**

Commissioner Grinder reviewed the meeting agenda.

**V. Approval of Minutes – March 24, 2014**

A motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the meeting minutes from the previous meeting.

## **VI. Introductions**

Commissioner Grinder introduced the three (3) newest TDVA employees: Amanda Jolliff, Attorney; Justin Moorhead, Legislative Liaison; and Tara Goodell, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner.

## **VII. Briefings:**

### **Director Charlene Ehret, VAMC Mt. Home:**

Director Ehret informed that there will be a new Clinic opening in Campbell County, Tennessee and another in Sevierville later this year that is under design now. Knoxville is showing the most growth in Tennessee and has the largest clinic. Unfortunately, there has not been opportunity to expand the space. It is with hope that the two new clinics will take some of the patient load off of the Knoxville clinic. There have already been approximately 500 patients currently receiving care that will transfer to the Campbell County clinic, which will free up Knoxville for additional patients. Both new clinics will have a new team of primary care providers.

Director Ehret also added that the Veterans Affairs System has made a commitment to look at every single access point, of which there are 500 in the country, to look at the way patients are scheduled and keeping track of wait times. They have built in a system of eligibility and criteria, i.e. service connected patients and Prisoner of War categories of patients may not have any wait times while those that are Priority Six (6) or Eight (8) may wait longer than a service connected would.

### **Director John Patrick, VISN 9:**

Director John Patrick provided his professional background and how he came to work for Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 9. The network encompasses facilities in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia, the largest growth of which has been found to be in central and eastern Tennessee. Director Patrick spent most of the summer of 2013 traveling to all of the major sites of care, to include hospitals and larger clinics. These sites were found to be a wonderful set of facilities serving our veterans in the three states. Director Patrick also stated that throughout his travels it was found that while these facilities do not necessarily work as a population health center for all veterans, each facility has certain areas that they do well, but the facilities are not necessarily working as well together as they could. He determined at that time that something needed to be put into place to encourage the facilities to work together. One of the main ideas was to have form service lines which would have overarching services that the leadership would take responsibility for guiding within the facilities. This idea would offer the opportunity to share best practices across the network. Director Patrick also identified that currently the Veterans Affairs (VA), the state, and Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) work by themselves. If they were to work together they would be able to do incredible things for the veterans.

Director Patrick recognized that while the VA is going through a bad time, there are good things that will come out of it. When General Shinseki testified to Senate, the Veterans Service Organizations said that the quality of VA care is very good and is comparable to anyone in the community. It is the job of VISN 9 to systematically try to put in place methods and systems so that the bad events happen as rarely as possible. The largest issue that has been found is

access. How it is talked about and the reality of it and the challenges surrounding it that have been put on the front line staff needs significant improvement. Director Patrick found with reviews that there is confusion amongst the front line staff as to which wait list to use and if it is ok to use another wait list. It was not communicated well with the front line staff that the wait lists and scheduling package is not just for scheduling veterans, but it is also for leadership to know where there is access demand.

Director Patrick provided a definition for the term "Electronic Wait List (EWL)." The EWL is the official Veterans Health Administration wait list and should not be confused with the Veterans Benefit Administration Backlog List. The EWL is a list of patients waiting for appointment or assignment to a primary care provider or team. It is used to keep track of new patients who have requested care but cannot be scheduled within 90 days and allows managers to see areas of increased appointment demand and how to make decisions to best accommodate the patients' needs including when to purchase care outside of the VA. The EWL has been in use since 2001 and is maintained on VA computer systems for use by staff.

Director Patrick also defined what the NEAR list is. It is a New Enrollee Appointment Request call list. This list is used by staff to notify schedulers at specific locations that a veteran has specified a preferred location and requested an appointment during the enrollment process. Director Patrick also defined the Exceptions List which is a list of veterans who have enrolled for care (new patients) and they are not able to be scheduled within 90 days and that is agreeable with the veteran. Those on this list are not placed on the EWL. Because of these varied lists, mistakes are made due to this current process being too confusing for the front line staff. A new process will be implemented nationally.

Director Patrick also informed that the current Veterans Identification Cards (VIC) will be changed to Veterans Health Identification Cards (VHIC). The VHIC will be replacing the old cards as they currently contain too much personal information. The new VHIC will have member identification, branch of service the veteran served in, and a unique identifier for the healthcare plan they belong to. Issue these new cards should begin to be issued July 2014 at any VA site of care.

Shawn Poston with the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) informed Director Patrick that the largest problem they've seen is access with the wait time being between 90 and 120 days. According to reports given to Director Patrick, the new patient average wait is 36 days. Director Patrick was also informed by Barry Rice with the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) that any Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) counseling, whether it be one-on-one or group sessions, have been cancelled in Cookeville, Tennessee. The patients, who are predominately Vietnam and Afghanistan veterans, have been told that they need to start going to Nashville for these services. Director Patrick was unaware that this had taken place and made note to investigate the events. He did inform that it has been talked about doing a "Hub and Spoke" type model here in the Tennessee Valley Healthcare system to be able to do telepsych and video telehealth. Mary Ross from the Women Veterans of America (WVA) stated to Director Patrick that one of the issues being faced is that with the recent media coverage received that confidence and trust have been lost with the VA medical system. Director Patrick retorted that his concern is that the numbers that are being reported are not the actual numbers being seen on the ground.

**Questions Directed to Director Charlene Ehret:**

John from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) inquired of Director Ehret what systems are in place for a new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). He also queried as to where the budget and oversight come from, an example of which would be the new clinic opening in Campbell County, i.e. how many doctors, nurses and administrative staff will be in attendance. Director Ehret apprised that there is actually federal funding received that is appropriated for rural health. They receive start-up funds for a year or more and receive Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA), which have increased due to complexity levels increasing. The new clinic in Campbell County will have one (1) doctor, one (1) nurse, one (1) Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), one (1) mental health provider, and one (1) clerk. With this staff, the clinic will be able to handle approximately 1,200 patients.

**Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder:**

Commissioner Grinder provided an overview for the TDVA's new strategic plan "Everything Veteran". One of the goals discussed was the idea of a bootcamp for veterans wanting to start their own business or for those who currently have a business and would like to expand. The idea was proposed by Michael Burcham of the Nashville Entrepreneur Center who is also a veteran. Another goal that Commissioner Grinder would like to see are VETS campuses. These campuses would be a great way to attract and keep veterans in Tennessee and maintain them through their graduation.

**Assistant Commissioner Yvette Martinez:**

Assistant Commissioner Yvette Martinez discussed the comprehensive web portal for veterans. The purpose of this portal is to be able to walk a veteran through, step-by-step, the process of applying for jobs, starting a business, or their education benefits. A fellow state department is working with one of their web geniuses to assist us in creating this portal at no charge. Assistant Commissioner Martinez informed that with the passing of Senate Bill 1433, the Tennessee Veterans Education Transition Support (VETS) Act, In-State tuition will be granted for veterans. The passing of this bill created VETS campus designations.

**Assistant Director Travis Kraft, VARO:**

Assistant Director Travis Kraft provided information about claims that the Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO) sends out. Very few claims are sent out with the exception of radiation claims, which are sent to the Jackson Regional Office in Jackson, Mississippi and contaminated water claims from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, which are sent to Louisville, Kentucky. When asked if VARO was expected to get any brokered claims from out of state this year, he stated that it was not foreseen for fiscal year 2014. Mike, with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), inquired of Assistant Director Kraft about the wait times for dependents being added to claims and stated that it is taking up to a year to have this action taken. Assistant Director Kraft replied that dependency claims are based on the age of the dependency claim. Those that have been in the longest will be seen to first.

**Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder:**

Commissioner Grinder announced that Davidson County will have its first County Service Officer in 39 years. The role will be filled by Lisa Kiss, who is currently Deputy Commissioner Cheek's assistant. She also thanked those groups who provided reports for the meeting.

**V. Unfinished Business:**

There was no unfinished business to discuss.

**VIII. New Business:**

There was no new business to discuss.

**IX. Future Meetings: Tuesday, September 9, 2014**

**X. Announcements:**

Mr. Frank Forbes of Disabled American Veterans (DAV) announced that the State Convention for the DAV will be at the Doubletree Hotel in Murfreesboro, Tennessee June 19-22, 2014. He also announced that the American Legion will be having their convention at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Knoxville, Tennessee June 12-15, 2014.

Bill Burleigh of Operation Stand Down (OSDN) reminded that the Afghanistan Veterans Parade will be Saturday, June 14, 2014 in Nashville.

John Furgess of VFW announced that in May of 1979, in the same building and the same chamber, United Tennessee Veterans Association (UTVA) met for the first time. This meeting marked 35 years on the books.

Mr. George Martin of AmVets announced that the State Department of Tennessee Vice Commander Curtis Rust announced the 2015 State Convention will be held in Paris, Tennessee. The State Amvets convention will be held at Glenstone Lodge in Gatlinburg June 5-8, 2014.

**XI. Adjournment:**

Commissioner Grinder adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.



United Tennessee Veteran Association

Sign-in Sheet

Tuesday, June 3, 2014

Name	Organization	E-mail	Phone Number
1) Vicki M STINNETT	WAVES NATL Unit #94	VMSTINNETT@AOL.com	301/502-2639
2) MARY ROSS	WVA Chapter 20	MARY@OSONASHVILLE.ORG	931/624-0772
3) BARRY RICE	TEEN STATE COUNCIL VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA	barryrice.tsc@gmail.com	615-479-8619
4) KATHY BELL	WVA CHAPTER 20	KBELL5526@AOL.COM	615-673-7639
5) JOHN FURGESS	VFW	N/A	615-812-1507
6) George M (Mike) Scott	VFW	geoscott@nctc.com maconvet@nctc.com	615 666-4644 Home 615 666-4480 Office
7) SHAWN POSTON	Wounded Warrior Project	sponston@woundedwarriorproject.org	904-673-4758
8) FRANK FORBES	DAV	SForbes1@bellsouth.net	615-834-4077
9) GEORGE MARTIN	AMVETS		615-944-8380
10) ROGER G. HANNAH	TOWN COUNCIL	Roger.Hannah@TN-Gov	615-6329